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Pre-primary education teachers and their values in the context of current education. Case Study

Gabriel Albu*

Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, Romania

Abstract

Along with family, the kindergarten teacher plays a crucial role in the initial socialization of the human being. For this reason, not only the knowledge that one holds are important, but especially the values directing one's life, founding one's actions and interpersonal relations. The present study seeks to reveal the values of a sample lot of kindergarten teachers in Prahova County and to show the importance of the axiological dimension of their training in the initial and continuing training stage.

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Introduction

Together with the family, the kindergarten teacher plays a significant role in the initial socialization of the small and innocent human beings (Berger, Luckmann, 2008). In the development and training of children the kindergarten teacher gets involved not only with their cognitive-conceptual arsenal and emotional-affective experiences, but also with the values which direct/orient their life and provide ground for their actions and personal interrelations.

These - the values the kindergarten teacher believes in - dictate their decisions and reactions, attitudes and behavior toward the little ones. Being present at any time of the interaction between the teacher and pre-schoolers, values may influence - more or less deeply - the motivations, reactions and behaviors of children. In this context, we can say that the root of the axiological universe (under construction) in young generation is the axiological

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: gabrielalbu04@yahoo.com

universe of the pre-primary teacher with which they spent their first years of life.

That's why, no matter how important the knowledge horizon of the teacher, the flexibility and openness of their mind, the fineness of their affective-emotional state, we cannot -however- bypass their axiological bases.

Between the multiple definitions of value, we can note that of S. Schwartz (1994, *apud* Gavreliuc, coord., 2006, p. 169), according to which it is a trans-circumstantial ideal, desirable socially, variable in importance, which acts as guiding principle in the life of a person or a social entity. It designates - from a psychological point of view and in most common cases - "a way of selective guidance that is correlated with the individual level of preferences, motivations, needs, attitudes" (Rohan, 2000, *apud* Gavreliuc, coord., p. 168). In short, the value we believe in "influences why we do the things we do" (Kashdan, 2013, p. 138).

The purpose of our research is to reveal the axiological universe of teachers in pre-primary education nowadays and to decipher the attitudinal and axiological atmosphere influencing our children's growth.

Micro-research

The current study constitutes a stage of a larger project which aims to reveal the values, principles and beliefs of teachers (in both pre-academic and academic education). In the present research we will deal with the body of educators in pre-primary/pre-school education (working in Prahova County schools). We will review their options from an axiological point of view.

The experimental group was made up of 22 subjects and structured according to the table below:

Table no. 1. The structure of the research sample based on seniority in education

Seniority in education	Number of teachers	Percentage
Over 20 years (E1)	10	45.5%
Under 15 years(E2)	12	54,5%
Total	22	100%

Research has been carried out from October 2012 to March 2013 and is qualitative. The research instrument was a questionnaire (which included open questions and, where appropriate, with the requirement to rank subjects' options). For the first option were granted 3 points, the second was awarded 2 points, and the third was awarded 1 point.

Data and results

Following the collection and analysis of the responses, we have found the following:

Table no. 2. The fundamental value of a life well spent *

With more than 20 years seniority (E1)	Under 15 years seniority (E2)
What has been achieved through children: 2 options	Family: 2 options
Humanity	The fulfillment of dreams
Faith in God	To create and leave something behind
Self-confidence	Wisdom
Spiritual fulfillment	Courtesy
Balance in everything we do	Goodness
To learn something new and useful every day	Dignity
	To live without regrets
	To live every moment to the fullest

**Henceforth, throughout this study we shall note with E1 the group consisting of kindergarten teachers with more than 20 years seniority, and with E2 the group consisting of kindergarten teachers with less than 15 years seniority in education (i.e., teachers trained in different ideological contexts).*

Table no. 3. The values in which kindergarten teachers believe in the most *

E1	E2
Respect (towards self, towards others): 23 p. Honesty, fairness, truth, sincerity: 18 p. Love thy neighbor: 9 p. Faith: 7 p. Family: 3 p.	Fairness, truth, sincerity: 15 p. Friendship: 7 p. Honesty: 6 p. Love: 6 p. Family: 4 p. Confidence: 4 p. Respect: 4 p.

* From E2 other options are: empathy (3 p.), dignity (3 p.), seriousness (3 p.), integrity (2 p.), conscientiousness (2 p.).

Table no. 4. The values in which kindergarten teachers believe in the least*

E1	E2
Bragging/boastfulness: 8 p. Pride: 5 p. Hypocrisy: 4 p. Material values: 4 p.	Money/material values: 8 p. Formalism/diplomas: 8 p. Lies: 8 p. Disbelief: 6 p. Hypocrisy/falsehood/perfidy: 5 p.

Table no. 5. The most important value relating to self

E1	E2
Self-esteem: 3 options Love Confidence Correctness Balance Truth Sincerity	Peace of mind: 2 options Dignity: 2 options Respect Wisdom Self-improvement Seriousness Honesty Sincerity Correctness Happiness

Table no. 6. The most important value in relation to others

E1	E2
Respect: 4 options Correctness: 2 options Understanding Harmony with others Confidence Sincerity	Respect: 2 options Self-improvement: 2 options (Active) communication: 2 options Sincerity: 2 options Good faith Goodness Mutual assistance Understanding

Table no. 7. The most important value relating to one's own labour

E1	E2
Correctness: 2 options Work well done: 2 options Efficiency: 2 options Love/dedication: 2 options Conscientiousness	Professionalism: 3 options Seriousness: 3 options Shaping valuable personalities (in children): 2 options Work well done Conscientiousness

Order	
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Table no. 8. The most important value for the work of a kindergarten teacher

E1	E2
Empathy: 2 options Love for children: 2 options Closeness to children: 2 options Respect Confidence To be understood by children	Love for children Respect for children/students Dedication Dignity Constant resilience to school environment Personal example Friendship with people around Confidence Personal fulfilment

Table no. 9. The most dangerous counter values in today's world *

E1	E2
Lies: 9 p. Hypocrisy: 8 p. Sluggishness/laziness/half-heartedness: 6 p. Careerism: 6 p. Complacency/self-sufficiency: 5 p.	Falsehood/hypocrisy: 7 p. Selfishness: 6 p. Lies: 5 p. Pride, the air of superiority: 4 p. Superficiality: 4 p.

* In **E1** following options appear: envy(3 p.), obsessive sexuality(3 p.), love of money(2 p.), nerve(2 p.); and in **E2** also appear: lack of respect (3 p.), infidelity(3 p.), titles(3 p.), material values(2 p.), evil (2 p.).

Table no. 10. The fundamental values which school should currently instill in students *

E1	E2
Thirst for knowledge/curiosity: 9 p. Respect: 7 p. Honesty: 6 p. Collegiality: 5 p.	Respect (towards self, towards others): 19 p. Love (of life): 6 p. Team spirit/cooperation: 4 p.

* In **E1** following options also appear: seriousness(3 p.), punctuality(3 p.), thoroughness(2 p.), self-confidence(2 p.); and in **E2** there are also: correctness(3 p.), faith(3 p.), altruism(3 p.), seriousness(3 p.), responsibility for one's own decisions(3 p.).

Table no. 11. The values of a man of quality, now and always*

E1	E2
Respect: 13 p. Honour, fairness, honesty: 9 p. Collegiality: 4 p.	Honour, fairness, honesty: 12 p. Respect: 5 p. Dignity: 5 p. Empathy: 4 p. Love: 4 p.

* **E1** also mentions: faith(3 p.), responsibility(3 p.), modesty(3 p.), professionalism(3 p.), desire for improvement(2 p.); meanwhile, **E2** listed: altruism (3 p.), common sense(3 p.), modesty(3 p.), decision making(3 p.), seriousness(3 p.).

Table no. 12. The value which, according to pre-school teachers, will always preserve/save the world

E1	E2
Faith: 3 options Love: 2 options Tolerance	Love: 3 options Mutual respect: 3 options Empathy: 2 options

Appreciation of life Professionalism	Faith Responsibility Modesty Everything human Conscientiousness
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Table no. 13. The required values for the future society, according to kindergarten teachers

E1	E2
Respect: 8 p. Tolerance/forbearance: 8 p. Confidence: 5 p. The love of people: 5 p. Faith: 3 p. Understanding between people: 3 p. Desire to learn: 3 p.	Respect: 13 p. Competence, well-trained people: 8 p. Honesty, reliability: 6 p. Love: 5 p. Altruism: 5 p. (Genuine) communication: 3 p. Common sense: 3 p. Empathy: 3 p.

Discussion, comments, interpretations

In respect of the fundamental value of a life well lived, from the data obtained we can see that we do not have common options, but rather differentiating elements between the two generations (**E1** and **E2**). Thus, if **E1** considers as essential *accomplishments through children* (2 options), humanity, faith in God, balance in everything we do or the motivation to learn something new and useful in every day, **E2** considers as essential: *family* (2 options), fulfillment of dreams, kindness, goodness, dignity, to live without regrets, to live life to the fullest or to create something and to leave something behind.

Looking more analytically, we realize that **E1** refers to "*learning* something new and useful every day" (s.n. - G.A.), whereas **E2** refers to "*creating* and leaving something behind" (s. n.- G.A.). If in the first case the emphasis is on *learning* (as a cumulative act, denoting emancipation, assimilation, extension of personal/professional knowledge), and in the second case, the emphasis is on *creating* (that act of producing something new, of enriching and beautifying humanity with the product of one's own creativity). Also, we note the fact that the motto of **E1** is rather "balance in everything we do", whereas **E2** has in view to "live life to the fullest" and "live without regrets".

Regarding the values in which kindergarten teachers most believe in, we can see that common options are: honor/honesty/truth, respect (for self, for others), love of neighbor and family. What distinguishes them are: **E1** additionally listed *faith*, and **E2**: *friendship, confidence, empathy, dignity and seriousness*. As shown, the options are most diverse, being important for a life that seeks fulfillment. Neither of the two lots of teachers mentioned (among their options): self-sacrifice, charitable acts, pro-social behaviors, a life in the service of community, etc.

The common values (for **E1** and **E2**) in which kindergarten teachers least believe in are: material values/money and hypocrisy/perfidy. As options that distinguish them we mention: **E1** rejects bragging, pride, whereas **E2** rejects: formalism, distrust, lies. It is to be noted that with **E2** *formalism* is the problem, one they are facing (in their life, in general, in their work, in particular) and that they disapprove of.

Common values which concern kindergarten teachers the most when referring to their own person are: (self) respect, fairness, honesty. What differentiates the two generations of educational subjects are: **E1** invokes: confidence, balance and love (perhaps it's about self-love!), whereas **E2** invokes: peace of mind (2 options), dignity (2 options), wisdom, self-improvement, seriousness and happiness.

Looking more carefully, we noted that **E1** does not mention *self-improvement*, and with respect to both categories of seniority no one selected: *creativity, initiative, critical spirit or friendship with self*.

With respect to the values that they are concerned about the most when relating to others, investigated kindergarten teachers have in common values such as: respect, understanding, honesty. What distinguish them are: for **E1**: correctness (2 options), harmony with others, trust (in others), and for **E2** (active) communication (2 options), good faith, kindness, mutual assistance. It is therefore obvious that **E1** mainly has in view harmony with

others, while **E2** has in view, in addition to communication, goodness and good faith, also *mutual assistance* (attitude not to be neglected in a world in which many of us need the - disinterested - help of others).

Regarding the value kindergarten teachers in the research sample lot are most concerned about when relating to their own work, it appears that common values (**E1** and **E2**) are: work well done and thoroughness. The difference between them: on the one hand, in the case of **E1**, efficiency (2 options), correctness (2 options), order, dedication; and, on the other hand, in the case of **E2**, professionalism (3 options), seriousness (3 options). We can see that in both cases (**E1** and **E2**) what stands out is dedication, to be fully absorbed in everything that involves the duties and responsibilities of a kindergarten teacher. Creativity, originality, courage, team work, other significant aspects of the work with the children, however, do not appear among these options.

As options relating to the most important value for the activity of a kindergarten teacher, we have found that the following were chosen: love for children, respect for them and trust. As differences, we hold: in **E1**, empathy (2 options), and in **E2** dedication, the ability to constantly adapt to school environment, friendship with others and self-accomplishment. We notice that, despite sensible differences, what transpires is *the joy of being with children and to work with them, without reservation*.

When asked to show what the most dangerous counter-values in today's world are, the subjects - kindergarten teachers - have as common options (**E1** and **E2**): hypocrisy/falsehood and lies. What distinguishes them: **E1** added: laziness/half-heartedness, careerism/unscrupulous ambition, complacency/self-sufficiency, and **E2** added: selfishness, the air of superiority/ arrogance and superficiality. Therefore, if in the case of **E1** are considered to be dangerous self-sufficiency and unscrupulous ambition, in the case of **E2** are considered dangerous: selfishness and superficiality. It appears that an important issue for social environment, in general, and for the relations between the teachers in pre-primary education, in particular, is a tendency toward unscrupulous ambition, superficiality, arrogance and hypocrisy.

If they are asked to choose the fundamental values which school should be currently instill in its students, the two groups **E1** and **E2** concurred that respect (to self and others) is the most important value. On the other hand, differences occur when **E1** offers: desire for knowledge, honesty, collegiality and **E2** offers: love (of life), team spirit/cooperation, responsibility for their own decisions. Therefore, with **E2** there no longer appears in the foreground the desire for knowledge, but do appear the team spirit and assuming one's own decisions, which means - apparently - that the focus has shifted from the cognitive to the decision-making level (of the volitional act) and the team spirit.

In connection with the values a man of quality, now and always, **E1** and **E2** have taken the view that these are: honesty/correctness/sincerity and respect. Subjects in the **E2** lot have also added: dignity, empathy and love. What we can see is that there appear weakly or at all values such as: responsibility, self-sacrifice, courage, initiative, charitable spirit, delicacy, discretion, patience, generosity, calm, etc.

For the kindergarten teachers participating in micro-research (**E1** and **E2**), the values that shall always preserve humanity are: love and faith (perhaps religious faith). Differences appear when **E1** offers: tolerance, professionalism and appreciation of life, and **E2** offers: mutual respect (3 options), empathy (2 options), responsibility, modesty, thoroughness. We notice that nobody invoked: cooperation, solidarity, intercultural dialog, constant environmental concern.

If we refer to the values necessary to future society, the subjects proposed common values such as: respect and love of mankind. But in the case of those who are part of **E1** more values are listed: tolerance (8 options), confidence (5 options), faith, understanding between people and the will to learn. As for those who are part of **E2**, values such as: competence (8 options), honour/correctness (6 options), (genuine) communication, common sense and empathy are also listed. As you can see, nobody mentioned: solidarity, discouraging excesses, authenticity-genuineness, collaboration, intercultural education, etc.

Possible conclusions and possible recommendations

Certainly, we are dealing with an exciting field of research (Sévililla, 2009), in the desire to deepen the axiological horizon of school and its people. Taken seriously, this beginning could be continued, perfected and extended. Concerned about the many, diverse and pressing issues of education and individual training, it is necessary not to sidestep concerns about knowing the values, beliefs, and life principles of the teachers, in general, and of those in pre-primary education, in particular. These are the ones guiding, organizing and coordinating their

relationship with themselves, with others (students, colleagues and/or parents/grandparents), with their work and with society as a whole. Also, the values, beliefs and principles of the teaching staff influence to a large extent the institutional climate and the direction of activities carried out in schools.

Noting that the options of the research sample lot were founded, rather, on common sense and tacit raw fundamentals, we believe appropriate to formulate an offer of ongoing training programs that pertain to the construction and consolidation of the axiological personality of each teacher in a world pressured by consumerism, relativism and nihilistic/negative/cynic spirit. Depending on the cultural requirements of teaching staff, we would be able to propose programs regarding the history of moral doctrines, learning the great theories relating to the moral development of the human being, matters relating to the effects of labor market on the moral behavior of individuals, matters relating to the effects of digital world on the moral and aesthetic construction of young generations (Gardner, 2012), programs related to postmodern ethics (Bauman, 2000) and applied ethics.

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